



## **GREATER VIRUNGA TRANSBOUNDARY COLLABORATION**

**Intergovernmental Organization- Organisation Intergouvernementale**

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### **Terms of reference for consultancy for developing a web-based tourism platform for marketing and booking of tour guides, trackers, porters, and craft sellers in the Greater Virunga Landscape**

#### **Background**

The Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration (GVTC) is an intergovernmental organization established through a treaty signed in 2015 between the governments of Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to promote collaboration on wildlife conservation and tourism development in the Greater Virunga Landscape (GVL). This region, with its eight wildlife protected areas, including the renowned Virunga National Park and Sarambwe Wildlife Reserve in DRC, Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda, and Queen Elizabeth, Rwenzori, Semuliki, Bwindi Impenetrable and Mgahinga National Parks in Uganda, holds immense potential for growth and development. The GVL is in the Central Albertine Rift (CAR), specifically the areas straddling the international boundaries of the three partner states where the above-stated protected areas are located.

Our consultations with various stakeholders, including tourists, guides, trackers, porters, craft sellers, and protected areas management, have revealed significant challenges. Tourists visiting the national parks often struggle to secure essential services, such as tour guides and porters, due to the lack of a unified platform. Similarly, local service providers face difficulties in gaining visibility and connecting with potential clients. The existing booking process does not adequately support these services, leading to missed opportunities and service mismatches. This underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive solution.

As part of GVTC's commitment to tourism development, we propose the creation of an online platform. This platform will not only provide tourists with a convenient way to find and pay for essential services like tour guides and porters, but also offer local craft sellers a digital marketplace to showcase their products. By bridging this gap, we aim to enhance the overall tourism experience and boost the local economy.

GVTC is seeking the expertise of a consulting firm to develop an online platform. This platform will serve as a centralized hub, allowing tourists to plan their expeditions and supporting the local economy. The consulting firm will be responsible for designing and implementing the platform, ensuring its user-friendliness and security, and providing ongoing technical support.

## **Objective of the consultancy**

The main objective of this consultancy is to develop an online platform for marketing and booking of tour guides, trackers, porters, and craft sellers in the GVL Region.

The specific objectives are:

### **1) Platform Development:**

**Objective:** Develop a comprehensive online platform tailored for marketing and booking services of tour guides, trackers, porters, and craft sellers within the GVL Region.

Tasks:

- Design and implement user-friendly interfaces for both tourists and service providers, ensuring seamless navigation and accessibility.
- Integrate features for booking tours, hiring guides and porters, and purchasing crafts, with options to specify requirements and preferences.
- Create a secure and efficient backend system to manage user data, bookings, availability, and transaction

### **2) Service Provider Management:**

**Objective:** Implement functionalities to enable service providers (tour guides, trackers, porters, and craft sellers) to register, manage their profiles, and indicate their availability on the plat

Tasks:

- Develop registration and profile management systems for service providers, allowing them to showcase their skills, expertise, and offerings.
- Design intuitive dashboards or interfaces for providers to update their availability and services offered and view booking requests.
- Implement notification mechanisms to alert providers of new booking requests or changes in availability.

### **3) User Experience Enhancement:**

**Objective:** Enhance the overall user experience of the platform to increase user satisfaction and engagement.

Tasks:

- Conduct user research to understand the needs, preferences, and pain points of tourists and service providers in the GVL Region.
- Optimize user interfaces, navigation flows, and interactive elements based on user feedback and best practices in UX design.

- Ensure responsiveness and compatibility across various devices and screen sizes to provide a seamless experience for all users.

#### **4) Payment System Integration:**

**Objective:** Integrate multiple payment systems into the platform to facilitate secure and convenient transactions for booking services and purchasing crafts.

**Tasks:**

- Identify and integrate payment gateways that are widely used and trusted within the GVL Region, including mobile money, PayPal, and regional payment processors.
- Implement secure payment processing functionalities, ensuring compliance with industry standards for data security and encryption.
- Test the payment integration thoroughly to verify functionality, reliability, and user experience.

#### **5. Promotion and Marketing Support**

**Objective:** Develop strategies and tools to promote the platform and attract both tourists and local service providers.

**Tasks:**

- Create marketing materials, such as website content, social media posts, and promotional videos, highlighting the platform's unique features and benefits.
- Collaborate with tourism boards, travel agencies, and local businesses to raise awareness and generate interest in the platform
- Implement digital marketing tactics, such as search engine optimisation (SEO) and targeted advertising, to reach potential users and drive traffic to the platform.

#### **Core Features of the platform**

The successful consultancy firm should develop a platform with the following core features. They may suggest additional features that could be incorporated.

#### **Tourist Interface:**

- User registration and profile creation.
- Advanced search functionality based on dates, required services (guides, trackers, porters.), group size, and special interests.
- Detailed service listings showcasing availability dates without disclosing individual names.

- Secure booking system integrated with various payment gateways (e.g., mobile money, PayPal, credit/debit cards).
- Review and rating system for service providers.
- Marketplace for local crafts with comprehensive product descriptions, images, and purchase options.

### **Service Provider Interface**

- Registration and profile creation for (guides, trackers and porters) managed by team leaders.
- Calendar feature for managing availability.
- System for receiving and accepting bookings.
- Dashboard for tracking earnings and booking history.

### **Admin Interface:**

- User account management
- Oversight of bookings and transactions.
- Content management capabilities for updating information and adding new services. Data analytics and reporting tools.
- Revenue management tools to track transactions and calculate GVTC's percentage from each transaction.

### **Technical Considerations:**

The platform will be hosted on a secure cloud infrastructure to ensure reliability, scalability, and data security.

Web Development Framework: Utilize robust frontend frameworks (e.g., React, Angular, Vue.js) paired with suitable backend technologies (e.g., Django, Node.js, Ruby on Rails).

Database: Employ scalable databases (e.g., PostgreSQL, MySQL) to store user data, service listings, bookings, and craft product information.

Payment Integration: Partner with reliable payment gateways like PayPal, mobile money providers, and regional credit/debit card processors.

Security: To safeguard user data and financial transactions, prioritize SSL encryption, secure authentication mechanisms, and routine vulnerability assessments.

Revenue Collection: Integration with a financial management system to automate revenue collection and reporting.

Marketing and Outreach:

Partnerships: Collaborate with local tourism boards, hotels, and travel agencies to amplify platform promotion.

Social media: Harness social media platforms to showcase platform features and target prospective tourists interested in the GVL region.

Content Marketing: Develop engaging content including blog posts, destination guides, and videos highlighting the allure of the GVL region and the benefits of utilizing the platform.

**Ownership and Rights:**

The platform, including all intellectual property rights, will be exclusively owned by GVTC. GVTC will have full administrative control over the platform, including content management, user management, and policy enforcement.

***Phasing and Timeline:***

Phase 1: Core platform design and development (1 month).

Phase 2: Pilot testing and onboarding of service providers (1 month).

Phase 3: Public launch and marketing campaign (1 month).

Phase 4: Ongoing maintenance, feature updates, and expansion.

***Budget Considerations:***

- Development costs.
- Hosting and infrastructure expenditures.
- Payment gateway fees.
- Qualification and requirement

**Proposals**

Interested consulting firms should submit a comprehensive proposal, including a technical and financial proposal, highlighting their relevant experience, approach, and understanding of the assignment. The proposal should also include the CVs of key personnel involved in the consultancy. The firm must submit two relevant samples of work.

**Evaluation Criteria**

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- a) Experience and expertise in developing online platforms (30%)
- b) Understanding of the Greater Virunga Landscape context and conservation and
- c) tourism issues

- d) Understanding of GVL stakeholder mapping focusing on platform targeted users
- e) and their current and future needs vis a vis this platform (20%)
- f) Methodology and proposed approach (20%)
- g) Qualification of proposed personnel (15%)
- h) Cost-effectiveness and value for money (15%)

### **Dispute Resolution**

GVTC will act as the mediator in case of disputes or claims arising from transactions or interactions on the platform.

### **Proposal Submission**

Proposals must be either in English or in French and submitted electronically to GVTC Executive Secretary by email at [es@greatervirunga.org](mailto:es@greatervirunga.org) and copying the following Email addresses: [rkabeya@greatervirunga.org](mailto:rkabeya@greatervirunga.org); and [pruhumuliza@greatervirunga.org](mailto:pruhumuliza@greatervirunga.org).

The deadline of submission is 20<sup>th</sup> June 2024 before.

**Dr. Andrew G. Seguya,**

**GVTC Executive Secretary**